DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 423 RC 013 155

AUTHOR Cousineau, Claude
TITLE The Outdoor Education Students in the Canadian University.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 20p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Career Choice; *College Students; Comparative Analysis; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Individual Characteristics; *Outdoor Education; Personality Traits; Physical Education; *Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Canada; University of Ottawa (Canada); University of Toronto (Canada)

ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to obtain selected information on outdoor education students of three academic departments (Physical Education and Recreology Departments, University of Ottawa; School of Physical and Health Education, University of Toronto) in Canadian universities, to determine what differences there might be between those who aspire to a career in outdoor education and other students in the same departments. Two questionnaires, one in 1980 and one in 1981, were administered to all third and fourth year students (N=284) of the departments to identify the number and proportion of students motivated towards a career in outdoor education, to determine if outdoor education students had different academic performances than others in the same department, and to provide data on intensive participation in outdoor recreation activities, motivations for such participation, and student motives for aspiring to careers in outdoor education. Results indicated: a large proportion of students in departments with such courses aspired to careers in outdoor education; students appeared to be equal in academic achievement to their peers in the same department, as measured by grade average; outdoor education students engaged substantially more in outdoor recreation activities than did other students; and reasons for engaging in those activities were the same for outdoor education students as for their peers. (CM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

rec25-01-8

THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE CANADIAN UNIVERSITY.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Claude Cousineau
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Claude Cousineau
Department of Recreology
University of Ottawa

1981

ED212423

Thousands of undergraduate students are taking courses in outdoor education each year in Canadian Universities. A conservative estimate is that four to five hundred of these students graduate each year hoping to pursue a career in outdoor education. This paper is an attempt to describe the main characteristics of this group of students. A review of the major publications in outdoor education and in higher education failed to provide any pertinent information on the nature of this type of student.

Most Universities are now offering credit courses in outdoor education. A recently compiled "Directory on Outdoor Education in Canadian Universities" (Grenier, 1981) reveals that 36 out of 44 Canadian universities are offering courses through their degree programmes in physical education, recreation, or, to a lesser degree, education.

Some academic departments offer as many as five courses in outdoor education. These courses usually are elective although some departments require their students to take at least one. Some courses are listed as "theory" courses, some as "practical" and others as a combination of both. All departments have

RC 013155

practical courses while only a few have theory courses. Through courses such s "Independent Studies" and "Internship", students can further their knowledge and experience in outdoor education. Related courses in other departments are also available, especially in the area of environmental studies.

Nine departments have a recognized "specialization" or "concentration" in outdoor education; two have a "certificat in outdoor education (Concordia University and Laurention University) four offer a baccalaureat degree with a major thrust in outdoor education (University of Calgary with a B.P.E. in Outdoor Pursuits, Lakehead University with a Honor Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation, Queen's University with a B.Ed. in Outdoor Education and Simon Frasor University with a B,Ed. B.Sc. B.A. M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Environmental Education). The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario also has a special arrangement with Northern Illinois University to have some graduate courses in outdoor education taught in the Toronto area each year. (Wiener 1981).

Several departments have expressed a desire to expand their services in outdoor education. While some plan to increase the number of courses, others are considering a concentration, a certificate and even an entire programme at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This expanding supply of courses in outdoor education across the country not only satisfies a certain demand but also stimulate it by inticing more and more students to enter this relatively young field of study.

Students taking courses in outdoor education may do so for several reasons. First are those who register because the courses are the only ones left that fit into their schedule or because they are perceived as an easy way to obtain credits. Second are those who believe that it would be beneficial to them either to broaden their professional preparation by getting "an idea" of what outdoor education is all about, or to "experience" an outdoor living laboratory for their personal growth and development. Third are those who discovered that outdoor education has become their main career choice.

This paper is focused upon the third category of students; those who aspire for a career in outdoor education. They are refered to as the outdoor education students.

The Outdoor Education Students

Are they different? Students of different fields of study have different personality traits (Singh 1968, Biglan 1971). For example, on the intraversion - extraversion factor, it has been shown that intraverts obtain higher marks (Wankowski 1973) and higher scores on standard tests of academic achievement (Bishop 1980).

Bishop has also noted that students in Physical Education and Recreation programmes are more extraverted than students in other academic departments or the general population. The extravert is

impulsive, seeks variety and high levels of stimulation, is socially oriented, somewhat conventional, needs fairly large amounts of temporal variation and change, prefers action over thinking and lacks persistence with certain tasks. These traits are also noticeable among many of the outdoor education students found is physical education and recreation programmes.

It is often said that young students in medecine like to wear their white coat, while the biology students carry their microscope and the law students wear a shirt and tie. This is perhaps a desire to overtly express an identity to a particular group or perhaps an image attributed to them by their peers. The students in outdoor education are also subjected to stereotyping which is exmplified by all sorts of symbolic behaviors.

The appeareance of the outdoor education students is often characterized by the Kodiac boots, the Levi jeans, and the Gortex jacket; perhaps a sort of trade marks to signify that one is primarilly interested in an outdoor life style. Sometimes, the image includes an opposition to hunting and a devotion to vegetarianism. Environmental issues are popular subjects of conversation. They seem to be perceived as warm, friendly, sensitive, caring, quite but enthusiaste. They often have a summer job as an outdoor leader. On a sunny afternoon they have been known to prefer the ski trails to their class in Statistics.

Some professors have noted that these students bring life to their class discussions but they have also noticed that these same students seem to have trouble with term papers and exams. Their marks in courses, within and outside their field of concentration, as a measure of academic achievement, are allegedly lower. But on the other hand, other professors have remarked that the outdoor education student is seldom an average student with a "B" mark; he/she performs either at the "A" level or the "C" level. But there is no evidence to support these impressions. They are images, perceptions and perhaps prejudices that may not correspond to reality and certainly not to each outdoor education students. So, given the absence of empirical description a study was undertaken to obtain selected information on the outdoor education students of three academic departments.

A Study on Outdoor Education Students

During the winter months of 1980, a one page questionnaire was administered to all the third and fourth year students of the Physical Education Department and the Recreology Department of the University of Ottawa, and the School of Physical and Health Education of the University of Toronto. Third and fourth year students were selected because it was assumed that they were more likely to be settled in their career choice than the first and second year students.

The questionnaire aimed at identifying the number and the proportion of students who were motivated towards a career in outdoor education. The results show that of the 284 students surveyed in all three departments, one third (33.8%) indicated that their major academic interests and career goal were in some form of outdoor leadership (see Table I). The number and proportion of students interested in outdoor education were slightly higher for females.

Table I. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHOSE MAJOR ACADEMIC INTEREST AND CAREER GOAL ARE IN OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP.

Departments	N	%
Recreology (University of Ottawa)	48/127	37.8%
Physical Education (University of Ottawa)	29/92	31.5%
Physical Education (University of Toronto)	19/65	29.2%
TOTAL:	96/284	33.8%

Having asked for the students university indentification number made it possible to obtain the overall academic performance (as measured by course grade) of each respondent. This was done in order to determine if outdoor education students had different academic performances compared with their peers in the same department.

In all three departments, there were very little difference between the grade point average of the outdoor education students and the other students in the same department (see Table II).

Table II. COMPARAISON OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BETWEEN THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION STUDENTS AND THE OTHER STUDENTS IN THE SAME DEPARTMENT.

Departments	O.E. Students	Others
Recreology (U. of O.)	5.8 GPA*	6.0 GPA
Physical Education (U. of O.)	6.0 GPA	6.4 GPA
Physical Education (U. of T.)	71.0%	70.9%

Note: A grade point average (G.P.A.) of 6 in the U. of O. system corresponds to a percentage range of 70-74.

Further probing might have shown that the outdoor education students perform differently in certain academic areas. For example, are they as skillfull as their peers in research design and scientific approaches to a subject matter? This remains a question for further investigation.

To determine if the outdoor education students were any different (apart from academic performance) than their peers the following questions were formulated:

a) do the outdoor education students participate more intensively in outdoor recreation activities?

b) do the outdoor education students have different motivations for participating in outdoor recreation activities.

During the winter semester of 1981 a second survey utilising a two page questionnaire, was designed and administered to third and fourth year students of the Department of Physical Education and the Department of Recreology at the University of Ottawa. Besides providing data for the two questions mentionned above, the questionnaire was also designed to find out the motivations for aspiring to a career in outdoor education.

Two hundred and twenty-five (225) students responded. This number represents more than 95% of the third and fourth year students in these departments. This high return is due to the collaboration of all the professors involved who agreed to circulate and collect the questionnaire during class time.

The respondents were almost equally divided between the two departments (51% in Rec. and 49% in P.E.), between males (51%) and females (49%), and between French (50%) and English (50%) speaking students.

The same question on career goal, as used in the first survey, was presented: "Does your major area of academic interest and career goal lie in some form of outdoor leadership (i.e. outdoor education, outdoor recreation programme, summer camps and

the like)?" Fifty-eight students (26.4%) responded in the affirmative. This represents a drop of almost 9% from the previous survey carried out with the same population a year earlier in which 35.1% were affirmative. This could be explained by the fact that a) the sample was relatively small and that b) the second questionnaire was more complex making the respondants more cautious in answering "yes" or "no" regarding a career choice. Nevertheless, it represents a subtantial number of students aspiring to a career in outdoor education. This group, was also equally represented in both departments but slightly more represented by female and English speaking students.

When asked if most of their leisure time was outdoor oriented, 91% of the outdoor education students responded "yes" compared to 55% for the other students. This was also confirmed by their responses to questions on extent of participation. The outdoor education students go camping more frequently than their peers in the same department: 70% as compared to 44.8% had camped out more than 10 days during the previous 12 months. They also engaged in more day-outing trips per year: 82.8% as compared to 56.2% had more than 20 outings per year.

Major reasons for participating in outdoor recreation were not, however, very much different than the reasons provided by the rest of the students in their departments. (see Table III).

Table III. MAJOR REASONS FOR ENGAGING IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Reasons	O.E. Students		Others	
	N	%	N	%
Health benefits of being physically active outdoors	33	56.9	84	52.8
Aesthetic and/or spiritual attraction of nature	34	54.5	76	47.8
Enjoyment of enduring evironmental stress, sustained effort or danger	12	22.2	24	15.7
Intense interpersonal relationship of small group living	11	19.6	29	18.6
Escape from civilization	10	18.2	39	24.4
Desire to be deprived of modern covenience	5	9.3	16	10.2

Note: Totals add up more than 100% because students could check more than one reason.

A majority of both groups was motivated by "the health benefits of being physically active outdoors" (56.9%). More than half of the outdoor education students (54.5%) or not quite half of the others (47.8%) were motivated by "an aesthetic and/or spiritual attraction for nature". About one out of five of the outdoor education students was motivated by the social dimension and/or the stress - risk - challenge of outdoor recreation. In all, their motivations were combinations of several factors, and varied according to the individuals.

The major reason for aspiring to a career in outdoor education was, for the great majority (91.4%), that they "enjoy participating in outdoor activities" (see Table IV). For three out of four (74.1%) previous job experience was also mentionned. Most were influenced by their family leisure lifestyle (67.2%) and were attracted by the "spirit" among the staff of outdoor education agencies (60.3%). Only two respondents indicated that they chose a career in outdoor education because of the salary attached to such a job.

Table IV. REASONS FOR ASPIRING TO A CAREER IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION.

Reasons	N	%
"I enjoy participating in outdoor activities"	53	91.4
"Most of my summer and part-time jobs have involved outdoor leadership"	43	74.1
"Much of our family recreation, when I was young, involved outdoor activities"	39	67.2
"I enjoy the group spirit among staff that outdoor jobs afford"	35	60.3
"The money attracts me to such a position"	2	3.4

Note: Total adds up more than 100% because the students could check more than one reason

In summary and solely based on the results obtained in this study, it has been observed that:

a) there is a large proportion of students, in departments where such courses are offered, who aspire to a career in outdoor education. In the departments surveyed the proportion was at least 25% and perhaps as much as 40%.

b) outdoor education students appear to be equal to their peers in the same department in academic achievement as measured by grade average.

c) outdoor education students engage substantially more (in number and time) in outdoor recreation activities than do other students in the same department.

d) the reasons for engaging in outdoor recreation activities are the same for outdoor education students as for their peers in the same department.

Discussion

It would appear that the outdoor education students only have three things in common. They share the same career goal, they register into courses in outdoor education and, on the average, they participate more in outdoor recreation activities. Apart from these traits, they are probably a rather heterogeous group as far as personality, behavior and academic performance are concerned.

A certain "image" might exist but an objective description of the outdoor education students is difficult to formulate. If one is possible it would probably parallel the description of a physical education or recreation student.

To promote a stereotype or to value a prototype would be undesirable and should be discouraged. The field of outdoor education, like its predecessors (physical education and recreation in most Canadian universities), has much to gain in remaining diversified. Many types of personalities, talents, aspirations, and backgrounds are needed to fulfill the many functions of outdoor education. This same diversity helps to keep the flow of innovations and the cross-fertilization of ideas in a dynamic state.

However, one concern that arises is the question of supply and demand. There is a growing job market for students prepared

for a career in outdoor education but it is certainly not sufficiently large enough to accomodate every outdoor education student currently enrolled in universities across the country. The economic conditions of the 1980 make it difficult for outdoor education programmes to expand. Universities must guard against luring their students into believing that job opportunities are awaiting all after graduation. For example in the Department of Recreology at the University of Ottawa where at least 26% of the students said that outdoor education was their major career goal, only 14% of the graduates actually held a position in outdoor education/recreation (Cousineau 1979).

A greater disillusionment must prevail among female students interested in a career in outdoor education. They outnumber their male counterparts but at the same time the jobs in outdoor education are filled mostly by males. The male dominance is particularly noticible when one looks at membership lists of outdoor education associations, directories of programmes in outdoor education and tabulation of key leaders in outdoor education.

As expected and mentionned earlier, one of the common traits of the outdoor education students is their higher degree of participation in outdoor recreation activities. The enjoyment that they derive from their outdoor leisure activities also seems to be the prime motivation for a career in outdoor education. It indicates, perhaps, a highly valued interrelationship between

leisure and work. The thought of "working" outdoors has much appeal for the young adult who already enjoys "being" in the outdoors. The appeal for a job in the outdoors often reflects an aversion for an "office" job.

Some students seem to want to continue an outdoor leisure lifestyle through their work. These students should perhaps be advised not to risk spoiling their main leisure my making it their work. These students should be made aware that jobs in outdoor education, like in any other career, involve responsibilities, discipline, contraints and frustrations. Most jobs in outdoor education also involve paper work and office work.

Students may anticipate a career in outdoor education based on their previous experience (camp counsellor, skill instructor, trip leader, etc.). Unfortunately, the attrition rate with this kind of employment is high. Workers may "burnt out" after two or three years, want more responsibilities, or desire a more stable and higher salaried job.

One would hope that the job motivations would be less egocentric and pleasure oriented, and more centered around the challenge facing an outdoor educator, for example, to help people in their rapport with the environment. Much pleasure can be derived from this role but it is the pleasure of work, and should not be confused with the pleasure of leisure.

The field of outdoor education needs educational programmes to train the adventure leaders, skill instructors, and the trail guides. If probably also needs to sort out the complex issue of certification. But the temptation to turn these responsibilities over to the universities needs to be seriously questionned.

A university education is not the answer to all the problems of leadership in outdoor education. Perhaps, too, it is not the best place for everyone who aspire to career in outdoor education. It is often regretful to see the right person in the wrong place. Many outstanding outdoor educators have never attended university. However, the field of outdoor education, like any as the field of human activity needs a certain proportion of its "workers", who have the desire and the ability, to undertake scholarly work at the university level. It needs individuals who have acquired and developed the necessary academic skills of analyzing, researching, planning, developing and managing. The field of outdoor education in Canada is filled with excellent "doers" but could always benifit with more critical "thinkers". The very limited amont of serious research in outdoor education in Canada attests to this. The outdoor education movement in Canada needs people capable of generating new knowledge and insights.

Giving university credit to all sorts of outdoor experience simply because learning seems to be taking place is not sufficient. As Nash (1980 p. 2) pointed out outdoor experiental learning has its place in university curicula but the experience

must be intellectualized. Knowing and understanding, rather than feeling and doing, should be the emphasized goals. He wrote that: "the general course dealing solely with techniques of wilderness travel and camping had best be left like instruction in tennis and sailing to non-credit recreation programs". He also add "that a faculty member is 'on' a wilderness trip does not necessarilly make it educational". It is hoped that a university courses in outdoor education would challenge the students to think, to question, and to probe the philosophical, political, economical, environmental, sociological, psychological and pedagogical foundations of those activities done in the outdoors in the name of education and/or recreation.

The university therefore, has a dual role in outdoor education. First it should prepare the student interested in a career in outdoor education by providing a broad based programme encouraging critical thinking. This should allow the student to move more easily amongst several related career choices in outdoor education. In other words, universities must not render a disservice to its students through "over specialization" which often limits the opportunities for employment. Secondly, the university has the responsibility to expose students in physical education, recreation, education and other fields of study to the philosophy and process of outdoor education. It would again be a disservice not to inform these students of the potential of outdoor education in their respective field.

References

Biglan, A. "Relationship between the Characteristics of Academic Tasks and the Structure and Outpout in University Departments". Technical Report 71-24. Organizational Research, University of Washington, 1971.

Bishop, Doyle. "An Investigation of some Temperament and Ability Differences Among Advanced Undergraduates of Selected Departments of the University of Ottawa", an unpublished document, Department of Recreology, University of Ottawa, 1980.

Cousineau, Claude. "The Recreation Graduates in the Field: A Career Profile of the University of Ottawa Recreation Graduates", Recreation Research Review, Vol. 7. No. 3, Dec. 1979.

Grenier, Jacques. "Directory of Outdoor Education in Canadian Universities", an unpublished document, Department of Physical Education. University of Ottawa, Ottawa, May 1981.

Nash, Roderick. "Wilderness Education: Principles and Practices: Journal of Enveronmental Education. Vol. II. No. 3. 1980.

Singh, A. "Interests, Values and Personality Traits of Students Specializing in Different Fields of Study in University" Educational Review, 1968. 1. (1).

Wankowski, J. Temperament, Motivation and Academic Achievement. University of Birminghon (England) Educational Survey Report, 1973.

Morris, Wiener, "The N.I.U. - C.O.E.O Contract: A Status Report" in ANEE. Vol. 10. No. [illegible], March 1981.

Title: "The Outdoor Education Students in the Canadian Universities".

Abstract: This paper is an attemp to explore selected characteristics of the outdoor education students in the Canadian Universities. It first looks at what is being offered and speculates on the student population aspiring to a career in outdoor education. Academic performance, lifestyle, and career motivation are examined from data collected in three departments. The paper concludes with a discussion on "image", job market, opportunity for women, motivation, and universities role.

Author: Claude Cousineau is an associate professor at the Department of Recreology, University of Ottawa. He studied at Laval, Springfield College, and completed in doctoral studies at the University of Northern Colorado.